



United States Department of Agriculture

## CONSERVATION CHOICES

# Pollinator Practices

Conservation practices that help provide habitat for pollinators, improve soil health, reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide other natural resource benefits.

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Des Moines, Iowa

[www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov)  
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Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world's food crops depend on plant-animal interactions to reproduce. More than 3,500 species of native bees help increase crop yields through the pollination process. Some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators like bees, butterflies and moths, birds and bats, and beetles and other insects.

Pollinators visit flowers in their search for food (nectar and pollen). During such visits, reproduction occurs as the bee, butterfly or other pollinator transfers pollen from one flower to another's female reproductive parts, which leads to the production of fruits and seeds.

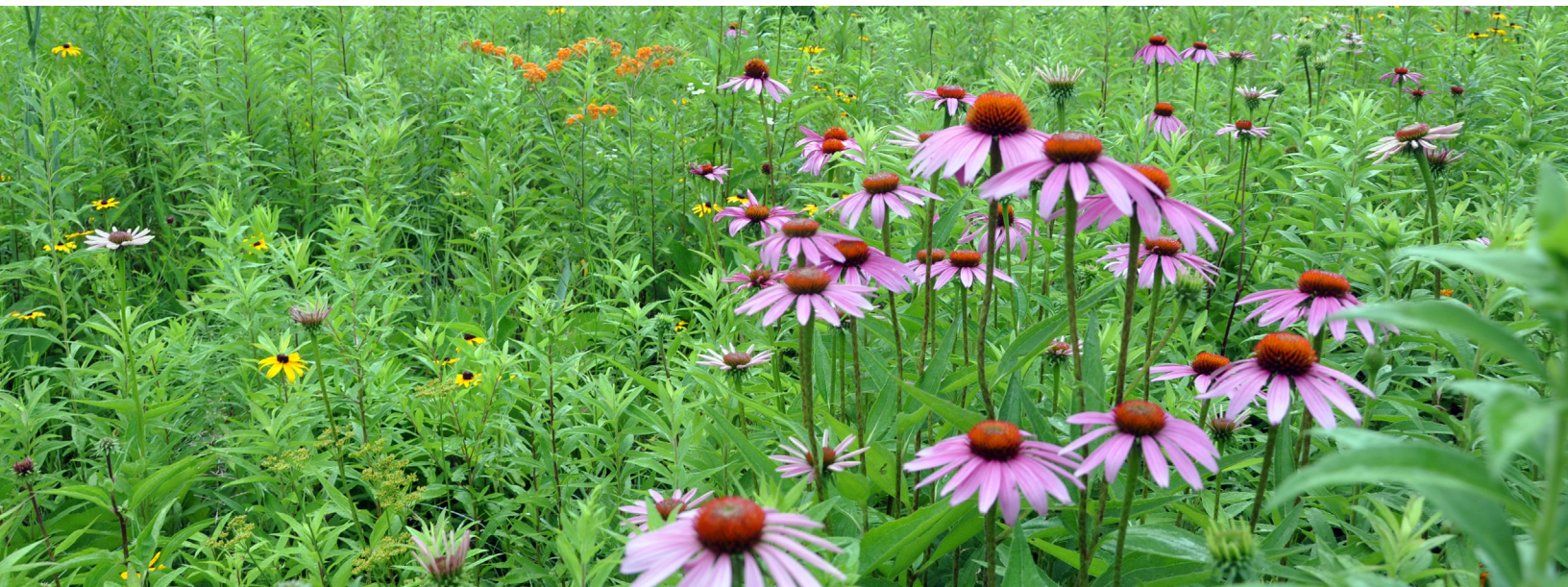
You may have heard that pollinator populations have declined rapidly over several decades. Habitat loss, disease, parasites, environmental contaminants among others have all contributed to the decline of many species of pollinators.

As a landowner or farm operator, you face many decisions and competing interests when managing your natural resources. When it comes to adding pollinator habitat to your land, consider installing the 12 common conservation practices listed in this handout to make the most direct impact on pollinators, while address additional resource concerns on your farm.

To maximize the pollinator habitat benefits of many of these practices, it's important to use Integrated Pest Management to carefully select pest and weed control methods.

To learn more about developing a conservation plan, visit the staff at your local NRCS office to improve management for all resource concerns. NRCS staff and your local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) are available to help you make the right choices to protect your operation and resources.

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# Pollinator Practices

Conservation Practice	Description	How it helps	Comments
<b>Conservation Cover</b>			
	Establishing and maintaining permanent cover of either introduced or native grasses, legumes and forbs for nesting cover, winter cover, brood cover, pollinator habitat, and food for wildlife.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plant diversity will ensure flowers are in bloom for as long as possible to provide nectar and pollen throughout the growing season.</li> <li>Reduces soil erosion.</li> <li>Improves water and air quality.</li> <li>Increases soil organic matter &amp; overall soil health.</li> </ul>	
<b>Contour Buffer Strips</b>			
 <i>Photo by Anna McDonald</i>	Strips of grass or a mixture of grasses and legumes that run along the contour of a farmed field. They alternate down the slope of a field with wider cropped strips. Consider native grass and forbs for pollinators and beneficial insects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diverse legumes or other forbs provide pollen and nectar for bees.</li> <li>Reduces soil erosion, removing sediment, nutrients, and pesticides as they pass through.</li> <li>Buffer strips using native plants and grasses improves soil health in those areas.</li> </ul>	
<b>Cover Crops</b>			
	Crops, including grasses, legumes and forbs, for seasonal cover and other conservation benefits to the soil. Plant prior to grain crop harvest or immediately after harvest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seasonal habitat for pollinators &amp; beneficial insects.</li> <li>Reduces soil erosion.</li> <li>Improves soil biology.</li> <li>Improves water infiltration.</li> <li>Traps, sequesters nutrients.</li> <li>Reduces weed competition.</li> <li>Provides livestock grazing.</li> <li>Increases soil organic matter.</li> </ul>	
<b>Crop Rotation</b>			
	Growing different crops on the same piece of land year after year in a planned, recurring sequence. This could involve a rotation to a small grain or a grass legume meadow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduces soil erosion.</li> <li>Rotating with alfalfa and other legumes reduces fertilizer needs.</li> <li>Reduces pesticide costs.</li> <li>Adds biological diversity to the soil.</li> <li>Improves water quality</li> <li>Adds pollinator habitat.</li> </ul>	







Conservation Practice	Description	How it helps	Comments
<b>Early Successional Habitat Development/Management</b>			
	Managing for early plant succession to benefit the desired wildlife or natural communities. Practices could include light disking, annual mowing, or prescribed burning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases plant community species and structural diversity.</li> <li>Important practice for maintaining open and sunny habitat for pollinators.</li> <li>Provides wildlife habitat for species that rely on early successional habitat.</li> </ul>	
<b>Field Border</b>			
	A band of perennial vegetation along the edge or around the perimeter of a field to help eliminate planting end rows up and down a hill and provide a turning area for farm equipment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Controls soil erosion where end rows would run up and down slopes.</li> <li>Provides food and cover for wildlife.</li> <li>A species rich mix of forbs that bloom throughout the year provides the best habitat for pollinators.</li> </ul>	
<b>Filter Strip</b>			
	A strip or area of vegetation next to a stream, lake, or other water body that helps remove sediment, organic matter, and other pollutants from runoff and wastewater.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protects water quality.</li> <li>Planting a diverse species mix provides a sequence of blooms throughout the year for pollinators.</li> </ul>	
<b>Forage and Biomass Planting</b>			
	<p>Planting grass and legumes suitable for pasture, hay, or biomass production.</p> <p>This does not apply to the establishment of annually planted and harvested food, fiber, or other crops.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improves or maintains livestock nutrition and health.</li> <li>Provides forage supplies during periods of low forage production.</li> <li>Plant a diverse mix of legumes and forbs that provide pollen and nectar for bees throughout the year.</li> <li>Provides wildlife habitat.</li> </ul>	



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Conservation Practice	Description	How it helps	Comments
<b>Prescribed Burning</b>			
	Fire applied to managed grassland, forestland, pasture land, wildlife areas, or hayland within a prescribed set of conditions, dates, and with appropriate safety precautions to achieve a specific purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controls undesirable vegetation.</li> <li>• Controls plant disease.</li> <li>• Improves plant production.</li> <li>• Removes debris.</li> <li>• Enhances seed production.</li> <li>• Helps maintain a diverse habitat mix in various stages of maturity for pollinators.</li> </ul>	
<b>Prescribed Grazing</b>			
	Managing the harvest of vegetation using grazing animals. This is often achieved through a rotational grazing system where pastures are divided (with fencing) into four or more paddocks.	<p>Improves or maintains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Species composition and vigor of plant communities;</li> <li>• Quantity and quality of forage for grazing animal health and productivity;</li> <li>• Water quality and quantity;</li> <li>• Habitat for pollinators, especially when a diverse plant community is incorporated.</li> </ul>	
<b>Riparian Herbaceous Cover</b>			
	Grasses, sedges, rushes, ferns, legumes, and forbs tolerant of intermittent flooding or saturated soils, established or managed as the dominant vegetation in the zone between upland and aquatic habitats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides food, cover and habitat for fish, wildlife, livestock and pollinators.</li> <li>• Improves water quality.</li> <li>• Increases water storage on floodplains.</li> <li>• Reduces erosion and improves stream bank stability.</li> <li>• Enhances pollen, nectar, and nesting habitat for pollinators.</li> </ul>	
<b>Wildlife Habitat Management (Uplands or Wetlands)</b>			
	The rehabilitation of degraded uplands and wetlands, or creating or enhancing areas to provide food and cover for wildlife.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable movement or provide shelter, cover, food in proper amounts, locations and times to sustain wild animals that inhabit uplands during a portion of their life cycle.</li> <li>• Can include managing for pollinator forage or nest sites.</li> </ul>	